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## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: SB 423, SD1 - RELATING TO STUDENT MEALS.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2017

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT  
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **supports SB 423, SD1**, relating to student meals, **with suggested amendments**.

In Hawai'i, food insecurity is one of the most pressing manifestations of overall socioeconomic inequality. Over 70,000 public school students eat free or reduced-price meals in our state, though only 40 percent eat school breakfasts. Hawai'i ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in school breakfast participation rates among qualifying students.

Congress established the National School Lunch Program, in 1946, and School Breakfast Program, fully implemented in 1975, to ensure that low-income students are properly nourished. Yet, many local families struggle to provide nutritious meals for their children. According the Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice, in Hawai'i, 15.3 percent of families experience food insecurity, meaning that "they do not always know how they will afford their next meal." An additional 3.9 percent are "very low food secure" families that have significantly reduced food consumption because of economic hardship.

At the same time, 47 percent of all public school students qualify for the Department of Education's free and reduced lunch program, a number that has risen by 20 percent since 2007 because of economic decline and cost of living increases. Low-income students are, again, less likely to receive adequate meals at home, leaving them without the calories necessary to perform basic academic tasks. Cases of chronic hunger can lead to achievement gaps, concentration loss, illness, increased absenteeism, behavioral problems, depression, and misdiagnosed learning

disabilities. Thus, providing a decent meal for our impoverished children—or in this case, ensuring that those meals aren't unnecessarily taken away—is a moral and educational imperative.

To make this measure more effective, however, we suggest an amendment to proposed subsection §302A-404(b)(2) to read: “Within **two weeks** following a student’s meal fund account reaching a zero or negative balance.” Many parents, particularly from low-income families, are paid on a two-week cycle. Our requested amendment will prevent children whose balance runs out during the beginning of a pay cycle from being denied access to school meals, something that could be particularly important to families facing unexpected financial emergencies.

Hungry students cannot focus. To ensure that our students are well-fed and ready to learn, the Hawaii State Teachers Association asks your committee to **support** this bill.



# HAWAII APPLESEED

## CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice  
Supporting SB 423, SD1 Relating to School Meals  
House Committee on Education  
Scheduled for Hearing Wednesday, March 22, 2017, 2:00 PM, Conference Room 309

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Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Har, and members of the Committee on Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in SUPPORT of **SB 423, SD1**, which is a commonsense way to reduce the frequency of students being denied meals at school as well as ensure our state's compliance with federal guidelines.

No one wants to see a child go hungry, and we all know that a student can't learn on an empty stomach. However, as KHON reported in May 2015, at times keiki in our schools are denied meals. In the KHON case, an Oahu brother and sister's lunch trays were taken away after their school meal accounts showed negative balances. Instead, they had to watch all the other students around them eat lunch.

According to their mother, she had deposited funds into her children's school meal accounts, but it appears that the processing was delayed. In other cases, busy parents may forget to refill their keiki's accounts on time. Or parents may forget to pack their kids' lunches, or their children may forget to bring their lunches from home.

Just over half of DOE school's students come from families whose incomes are low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. But in the rush of the beginning of the academic year, it can take a few weeks for schools to process their meal applications. In the meantime, the students' parents may not be able to afford to pay full price for school meals.

By making sure that students are not denied schools meals "solely for failure to pay" during the first month of the school year while their free or reduced-price meal applications are being processed, nor in the first week after their meal account balances reach zero or below, we are helping avoid unfortunate scenarios like the one reported by KHON.

In addition, school cafeteria workers, many of whom chose their careers because they love children, dislike having to take meals away from children that they serve. Teachers and principals know that hungry students can be disruptive and won't be learning while their stomachs are growling. Parents are usually furious when they learn that their child was denied a meal at school, especially when an administrative delay was the cause.

While the financial challenges of school meal programs are real, the measures proposed in SB 423, SD1 are an effective way to avoid denying meals to children due solely to issues with school meal application processing delays or account balances. The month-long and week-long grace periods are appropriate to ensure that school meal applications are processed and school meal accounts are replenished, respectively.

According to a recent School Nutrition Association survey, almost half of districts across the nation had a formal policy, and over a quarter had an informal procedure, in place for dealing with students lacking funds to pay for school meals. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which administers the school meals programs, has communicated to School Food Authorities that they must have a written unpaid meal charge policy in place no later than July 1, 2017.

SB 423, SD1 is essential ensure both compliance with federal policies and that as many children as possible receive nutritious meals during the school day.

## EDNtestimony

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**From:** mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov  
**Sent:** Monday, March 20, 2017 12:57 PM  
**To:** EDNtestimony  
**Cc:** kaulanad@gmail.com  
**Subject:** \*Submitted testimony for SB423 on Mar 22, 2017 14:00PM\*

### **SB423**

Submitted on: 3/20/2017

Testimony for EDN on Mar 22, 2017 14:00PM in Conference Room 309

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Kaulana Dameg	Individual	Support	No

### Comments:

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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## EDNtestimony

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**From:** mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov  
**Sent:** Monday, March 20, 2017 7:41 PM  
**To:** EDNtestimony  
**Cc:** mendezj@hawaii.edu  
**Subject:** \*Submitted testimony for SB423 on Mar 22, 2017 14:00PM\*

### **SB423**

Submitted on: 3/20/2017

Testimony for EDN on Mar 22, 2017 14:00PM in Conference Room 309

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Javier Mendez-Alvarez	Individual	Support	No

### Comments:

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## EDNtestimony

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**From:** mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov  
**Sent:** Monday, March 20, 2017 10:15 PM  
**To:** EDNtestimony  
**Cc:** begoniabarry@gmail.com  
**Subject:** \*Submitted testimony for SB423 on Mar 22, 2017 14:00PM\*

### **SB423**

Submitted on: 3/20/2017

Testimony for EDN on Mar 22, 2017 14:00PM in Conference Room 309

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Barbara Barry	Individual	Support	No

### Comments:

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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March 21, 2017

To: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair  
Representative Sharon E. Har, Vice Chair  
Committee on Education

From: Deborah Zysman, Executive Director  
Hawaii Children's Action Network

Re: **SB 423 SD 1 – Relating to Student Meals**  
**Hawaii State Capitol, Room 309, March 22, 2017, 2:00 PM**

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**On behalf of Hawaii Children's Action Network (HCAN), we are writing to support SB 423 SD 1– Relating to School Meals.**

Hawaii has been ranked as the state where people are most likely to live paycheck to paycheck. With this income insecurity, often times families do not have the disposable income to pay for school lunches on schedule. **SB 423** will provide food security for numerous children until the family can qualify for free or reduced-price lunches or be able to deposit money into the child's account.

It is necessary to develop a “charge” program for these instances. Yet, according to the School Nutrition Association's 2016 State of School Nutrition Survey, 76% of school districts reported that their meal program had unpaid student meal debt at the end of the 2014-15 school year. The option some schools districts are choosing is to remove the co-pay for children receiving reduced price lunch or to offer universal free lunches for the entire school, these options provide an increase in enrollment in the program providing additional federal dollars and significant administrative cost savings. The debt taken on by the schools through HB 423 should be monitored and additional revisions to the Department of Education's policies considered in the future.

It is important for Hawaii's students to continue receiving meals:

- **Students who come to school hungry cannot focus, and children suffering from food insecurity are unable to grow to their full potential.** Undernourished children don't learn as fast or as well as nourished children. Children struggling with hunger are more susceptible to obesity & its health consequences. Children who struggle with hunger are sick more, recover slowly, & are hospitalized more frequently. Teens who regularly face hunger are more likely to be suspended & have difficulty getting along with others. (nokidhungry.com)



- **Hawaii Participation in School Meal Program:** As the economy faltered, Hawaii saw its numbers of free/reduced-price lunch-qualifying children rise. Children with family incomes below 130 percent of the poverty level receive free meals, and a family with a household income between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level qualifies a student for a reduced-price meal. Today, 47 percent of Hawaii's public school children qualify for free and reduced price lunch, an increase of 20 percent since 2007. ([www.hiappleseed.org/school-meals](http://www.hiappleseed.org/school-meals))

**For these reasons, HCAN respectfully requests that the committee pass this bill.**

HCAN is committed to building a unified voice advocating for Hawaii's children by improving their safety, health, and education. Last fall, HCAN convened input in person and online from more than 50 organizations and individuals that came forward to support or express interest for a number of issues affecting children and families in our state that resulted in the compilation of 2017 Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda, which can be accessed at <http://www.hawaii-can.org/2017policyagenda>.